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## Recipient's Reponses in Daily Counseling and Helping Situation

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### Abstract

We collected data from Japanese college students (n=180) to examine what kind of recipient's responses is promoted with recipient's emotions when he/she presented with a difficult problem in counseling and helping situation. We used structural equation modeling analysis to estimate the relationship between recipient's emotion and responses. Results indicated that there were particular relevant between emotions and responses. Recipient's responses caused in counseling situation varied with the types of the experienced emotion.

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### 1. Introduction

The necessity of stress management to maintain physical and psychological health has been emphasized (Choen & Wills, 1985). According to statistics from the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in 2002, of the wide variety of ways to cope with stress, "consultation" is one of the most popular: an individual consults another person about his/her troubles by talking/complaining, asking for advice, or writing an e-mail. Talking about a current problem with another person is considered a common coping strategy for stress in daily life.

#### 1.1. Research on counseling in daily life

How talking about a problem with another person affects mental health has been studied in various areas of social psychology: self-disclosure (e.g., Pennebaker, 2000), coping (e.g., Aldwin & Revenson, 1987), or social support (e.g., Choen & Wills, 1985). Many studies in these areas have demonstrated that such consultation positively affects the physical and psychological health of the consuler. Some researchers have attempted to identify adequate self-disclosure that has such positive effects. Also, many studies on social skills or coping styles have been conducted to identify an adequate approach for the consuler's that effectively reduces the consuler's stress. Usually in these studies, the consuler's approach in the counseling situation is the independent variable, and the improvement in the consuler's mental health as a result of the counseling is the dependent variable. Meanwhile, studies on social support have been conducted to identify the kind of support that effectively helps individuals with

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problems. In this case, the support the consuler receives from another person is the independent variable and the improvement in the consuler's mental health as a result of the received support is the dependent variable.

As described above, most studies conducted so far have focused on the effect of the consuler's behavior on his/her mental health. In other words, research findings have been accumulated regarding the consulers who talk to someone about their problems. On the other hand, the people who listen and reply to someone else's problem have not been sufficiently studied. In this study, I focused on recipients (consultee), those who respond to others by counseling them, and conducted empirical studies on their responses and psychological processes in a daily consulting and helping situation.

### *1.2. Research on responses of recipient in counseling situations*

As long as counseling occurs between two people, the behavior of the consuler and the recipient displays a circulative processes. When a consuler talks about his/her problems with another person, he/she assumes that the responses of the recipient implicitly or explicitly reflect the "values" (agreement or disagreement) and "willingness of involvement" (active or passive) of the recipient. Although a recipient does not present topics, he/she does not play only a passive role in counseling. On the contrary, he/she is an active performer who establishes his/her position by expressing his/her values and willingness of involvement. From the perspective of the recipient, his/her response in a counseling situation is also a self-presentation.

Some studies have been conducted to examine various responses by recipients in counseling. These studies can be divided into two types. One focuses on responses of professionals such as healthcare practitioners, lawyers, teachers, and clinical counselors (e.g. Harada, 2004; Mizuno & Ishikuma, 1999; Tamura & Ishikuma, 2001). The other focuses on responses of non-professionals with no expertise, such as friends. Since most counseling involves non-professional recipients such as friends, we focused on the latter type of study.

The "amateur counselor" studies (e.g. Harada, 2003) investigate the responses of a non-professional in a counseling situation. Harada (2003) conducted a role-playing experiment in which an undergraduate student consulted a person of the same sex and age group. Harada collected the words said by a recipient during the experiment and analyzed them using the grounded theory approach, which is a kind of qualitative one. The analysis showed that recipient's words could be divided into six categories: "guessing/understanding/confirmation", "affirmation/reception", "searching for information", "disclosure of self and acquaintance", "presentation of a different viewpoint", and "remarks aimed at solving the problem" ("recommending implementation of an action plan" or "recommending acceptance of the trouble"). Harada (2003) then pointed out that, a non-professional recipient exhibited behavior that a professional recipient would not. He/She was "disclosure of self and acquaintance", in which the recipient talked about his/her own experience or that of an acquaintance; and "recommending acceptance of the trouble", in which the recipient encouraged the consuler to accept the current situation.

Meanwhile, Moriwaki (2002) analyzed free descriptions provided by a undergraduate student and developed a recipient response scale that measures positive and negative responses of those who listened to the other individual disclose something. According to this scale, listener's positive responses to self-disclosure were divided into the following four categories: "serious attitude", "advice", "sincere response", and "empathy". In addition, His/Her negative responses were divided into the following four categories: "negative feedback/ignorance", "indifference", "lack of seriousness", and "weak response".

These studies have great implications regarding how a non-professional responds in a common counseling situation. These studies, however, have some limitations as well. The categories of responses in Harada (2003) were generated from not non-verbal but verbal responses of a recipient in counseling situation. Moreover, why the recipient chose to give the responses he/she did in the counseling situation was not clear. The scale developed by Moriwaki (2002) consisted of questions about recipient's responses, but they were limited to the ones perceived and interpreted by a consuler who disclosed his/her problems. For this reason, a different study must be conducted in order to examine recipient's selection of verbal or non-verbal responses, focusing on the recipient who was an active participant in counseling.

Note that the past studies did not consider the nature of the problems on which recipient was consulted. When a problem was difficult for a recipient to respond, his/her response was believed to be strongly influenced by his/her response choice strategy.

The first goal of this study, therefore, was to examine in detail variations of verbal and non-verbal responses exhibited by a non-professional when presented with a difficult problem to handle or solve.

### *1.3. Research on recipient's emotions*

As described above, counseling occurs between two-people. A recipient is expected to respond appropriately to the trouble presented. Because a recipient is always evaluated by a counselor, a recipient may have negative emotions such as confusion, anger, or sadness when faced with a problem to which he/she has no confidence in his/her ability to respond appropriately. At the same time, however, such a difficult problem may trigger positive emotions in a recipient such as pleasure since being presented with such a problem suggests that the counselor trusts and relies on the recipient. A recipient is thus believed to experience a wide variety of emotions as he/she listens to the counselor's trouble.

Research on prosocial/helping behavior has established that an individual is likely to exhibit prosocial behavior toward others when he/she has positive emotions (e.g., Batson, 1990). Because a daily counseling situation is a kind of the help-seeking situation, it is important to focus on the relationship between emotions and responses of a recipient in a daily counseling situation.

So far, however, there has been no research on variations of recipient's emotions or how such emotions affect a recipient's response choices in common counseling. The second goal of this study was to examine recipient's emotions and their effects on response choices.

### *1.4. Overview of the study*

I conducted two different studies for the two above-mentioned goals. In Study 1, I administered an open-ended questionnaire to collect exploratory data on problems that were disclosed by a friend in past counseling, emotions that a recipient experienced while listening to a counselor, and his/her actual responses. The obtained free descriptions were analyzed by the KJ method, which is a qualitative approach.

In Study 2, I developed scales for a non-professional recipient's responses and emotions on the basis of the generated categories in Study 1. Then, using analysis of structural equation modeling (SEM), I examined the relationships between emotions and responses of a non-professional recipient when he/she was told a friend's problems that were difficult for a recipient to respond to appropriately.

## **2. Study 1**

The purpose of Study 1 was to administer an open-ended questionnaire to collect data of responses and emotions that a non-professional recipient had experienced when a friend presented a difficult problem that the recipient felt was hard to solve. To generate various categories of responses and emotions from qualitative data, the KJ method was conducted.

### *2.1. Method*

#### *2.1.1. Participants and procedure*

I conducted an open-ended questionnaire with undergraduate students after a lecture at a university in Japan. The data gathered from 20 students (1 man, 19 women; a mean age of 20.9) were then analyzed.

#### *2.1.2. Measurements*

A questionnaire in Study 1 included the following three open-ended questions. (1) Contents of problems disclosed by a friend: This question asked for contents of problems that a participant has been told by his/her friends and felt were hard to solve. (2) Recipients' emotions: This question asked what emotions the participant felt when he/she listened to the problem. (3) Recipients' responses: This question asked how the participant responded to the friend.

## 2.2. Results and discussion

To generate adequate categories, the obtained free description was analyzed in accordance with each question through the KJ method. The obtained free descriptions were summarized into some categories on the basis of similarity of meaning.

### 2.2.1. Contents of problems disclosed by a friend

Contents of problems that a non-professional recipient was likely to be told by his/her friend and felt was hard to solve were classified into the following six categories: “trouble with a family member”, “trouble at school”, “trouble with a friend”, “trouble with a boyfriend/girlfriend”, and “psychological problem”. A wide variety of problems were covered, including serious interpersonal problems and life-and-death issues.

### 2.2.2. Recipients' emotions

Emotions that a non-professional recipient was likely to experience when told a difficult problem by their friend were classified into the following ten categories: “sadness”, “pleasure”, “irritation”, “hatred”, “anxiety”, “willingness to help”, “confusion with resignation”, “confusion with effort”, “empathy”, and “abandonment of problems”. Note that these emotions were generally directed at the trouble itself, the consulter, or the recipient him/herself.

### 2.2.3. Recipients' responses

Responses that a non-professional recipient was likely to choose when told a difficult problem by their friend were classified into the following six categories: “understanding” (active listening, questioning, confirming), “presenting opinion” (positive or negative feedback, disclosing self and acquaintance, giving advice), “empathizing” (encouragement and agreement), “ignoring”, “responding as expected by the consulter”, and “continued involvement”. While the categories I generated in this study and the categories generated by Shinozaki (1998) and Harada (2003) share much content in common, only my study found the category such as “ignoring” that suggested evasion from the situation.

## 3. Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to develop items that can measure non-professional recipient's emotions and responses based on the categories in Study 1. Then, using these items, I examined the relationships between recipient's emotions and responses when recipient was consulted by their friend about a difficult problem.

### 3.1. Method

#### 3.1.1. Participants

I conducted the following questionnaire with undergraduate students after a lecture at a university in Japan. Studies 1 and 2 had different participants. The data gathered from 180 students (88 men, 92 women; a mean age of 19.2) were then analyzed. Data of those who submitted incomplete responses were excluded.

#### 3.1.2. Structure of the questionnaire and procedure

Each participant received a questionnaire. First, he/she was told to read the description of a problem at the beginning of the questionnaire while imagining that his/her close friend had that trouble. I created two difficult problems, “trouble with a cheating lover” and “feelings of depression”, on the basis of the results of Study 1, and each questionnaire had only one of them. Therefore, the participant read only one of these two problems.

After reading the description of the problem, each participant answered the following items. Note that the each item was developed on the basis of the categories generated as well as free description collected in Study 1. (1) Manipulation check: the participant estimated how difficult he/she would feel it were to respond adequately if he/she were actually presented with the problem in his/her questionnaire. (2) Recipients' emotions: The participant answered 31 items about how he/she would feel if he/she were presented with that problem. (3) Recipients'

responses: The participant answered 35 items about how he/she would respond if he/she were presented with that problem. All items ranged from "Strongly disagree (1 point)" to "Strongly agree (7 points)".

### 3.2. Results and discussion

#### 3.2.1. Manipulation check

The purpose of this study was to examine the emotions and responses of a non-professional when he/she was consulted with a problem that was difficult to respond. Therefore, a presented issue must be perceived as difficult to respond by a participant. For this reason, I conducted the *t* test to see whether or not the average score for the question "I would be troubled if someone consulted with me about this problem" was significantly higher than 4 point, which was at the middle of the 7 point scale. The result indicated that a participant perceived both presented problems as being difficult.

#### 3.2.2. Expletory factor analysis of participant's emotions

The 31 items were factor analyzed using a principal components model with promax rotation. Five factors model was adopted on the criteria that eigenvalues were greater than 1 and meaning of each factor was readily interpretable. Finally, 20 items remained, after omitting 11 items that their primary factor loadings were smaller than .35. The analysis yielded five factors corresponded to the five emotions: "irritation", "anxiety", "pleasure", "sadness", and "helplessness". The  $\alpha$ -coefficients of each factor were .62–.91.

#### 3.2.3. Expletory factor analysis of recipient's responses

The 35 items were factor analyzed using a principal components model with promax rotation. Four factors model was adopted on the criteria that eigenvalues were greater than 1 and meaning of each factor was readily interpretable. Finally, 24 items remained, after omitting 11 items that their primary factor loadings were smaller than .35. The analysis yielded four factors corresponded to the four responses: "active listening", "remarks aimed at solving the problem", "approaching and cheering", and "affirmation of action". The  $\alpha$ -coefficient of each factor were .65–.80.

#### 3.2.4. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 indicated the means, standard deviations, and  $\alpha$ -coefficients for subscales of recipient's emotions and responses.

Table 1  
Means and Standard deviations of recipient's emotions and responses

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Emotions		
<i>Irritation</i>	3.06	1.08
<i>Anxiety</i>	4.97	1.08
<i>Pleasure</i>	5.11	1.15
<i>Sadness</i>	3.94	1.14
<i>Helplessness</i>	4.90	0.89
Responses		
<i>Active listening</i>	5.53	0.68
<i>Remarks aimed at solving the problem</i>	4.66	0.78
<i>Cheer</i>	4.70	0.92
<i>Affirmation</i>	3.75	0.99

#### 3.2.5. Structural equation modeling

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to investigate the effects of paths from all four emotions to all five responses. For the first model, GFI = .97, CFI = .95, and RMSEA = .11. In order to improve RMSEA, nonsignificant paths were omitted from the model. For the final model we used, GFI = .97, CFI = .96, and RMSEA = .06; therefore,

the fit was good. This model was showed in Figure1. Table 2 showed all significant or marginal significant path coefficients in the model.

“Irritation” had negative effects on “active listening” and “remarks aimed at solving the problem”. “Anxiety” had positive effects on “active listening” and “cheer”. “Pleasure” had positive effects on “affirmation”, “remarks aimed at solving the problem” and “cheer”. “Sadness” had positive effects on “cheer” and “affirmation”. “Helplessness” had positive effect on “active listening” and negative effects on “remarks aimed at solving the problem” and “affirmation”. These results showed there were particular relevant between emotions and responses. Recipient’s responses caused in counseling situation varied with the types of the experienced emotion.

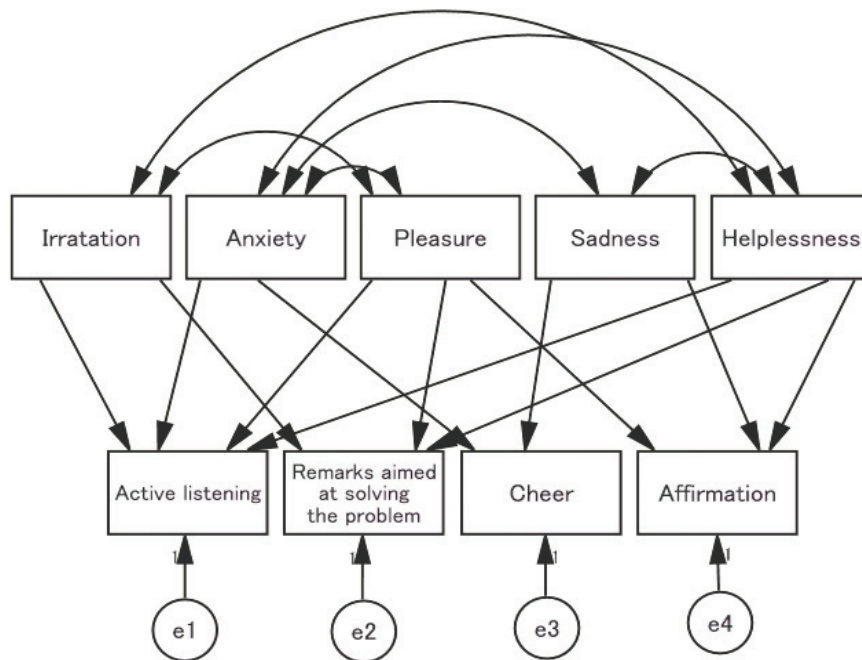


Figure 1. Structural equation model between emotions and responses

Table 2  
Paths coefficients of the final model.

	Emotions				
	<i>Irritation</i>	<i>Anxiety</i>	<i>Pleasure</i>	<i>Sadness</i>	<i>Helplessness</i>
Responses					
<i>Active listening</i>	-.27**	.16*	.31**	—	.15*
<i>Remarks aimed at solving the problem</i>	-.17*	—	.30**	—	-.36**
<i>Cheer</i>	—	.28**	—	.14 <sup>†</sup>	—
<i>Affirmation</i>	—	—	.26**	.25**	-.24**

Notes: <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ . Values shown in this table are standardized coefficients.

#### 4. Conclusion

We conducted two empirical studies to identify variations of emotions and verbal as well as non-verbal responses exhibited by a non-professional when he/she was consulted by his/her friend about a difficult problem. I then examined the effects of these emotions on their response choices. The conclusion of this study is described below.

##### 4.1. Method Variations of recipient's emotions and responses

This study identified four negative emotions and one positive emotion. These categories were similar to basic emotions (Ekman, 1999).

Recipient's responses classified 4 factors. These four factors might be plotted based on their meaning as shown in Figure 2. The vertical axis indicates the "willingness to intervene". It relates to whether or not a recipient actively presents his/her opinions to influence the current state of a consulter. The horizontal axis indicates the "values". It shows if a recipient is receptive or non-receptive about the consulter's current states.

##### 4.2. Effect of emotions on responses

"Irritation" resulted in decreased "remarks aimed at solving the problem", which was an active-receptive response, and also resulted in decreased "active listening", which was a passive-receptive response. This means that an irritated recipient showed decreased passive acceptance and active rejection to consulters. "Anxiety" resulted in increased passive-non receptive as well as passive-receptive responses, thereby increasing overall passive responses. "Sadness" resulted in increased passive-non receptive and active-non receptive responses, making the recipient encourage the consulter to change the current situation. "Pleasure" resulted in increased active-receptive, active-non receptive and passive-receptive responses. Therefore pleasure encouraged the recipient to have a receptive attitude totally. Additionally, active intervention by the recipient increased. Finally, "Helplessness" resulted in increased passive-receptive responses, decreased active-receptive and active-non receptive responses.

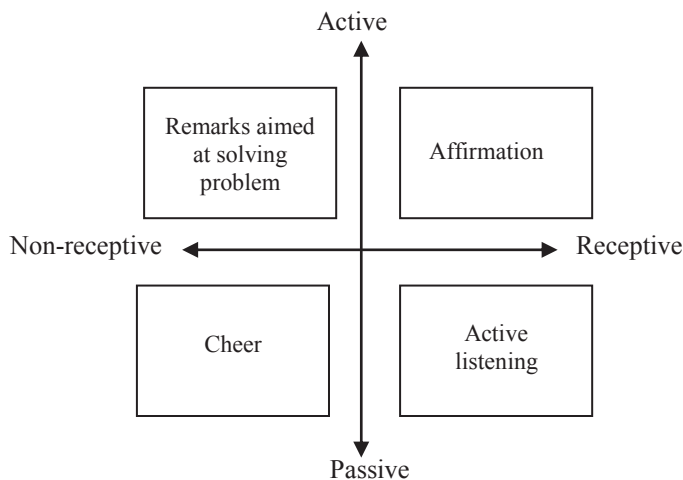


Figure 2. The relationships of 4 types of responses

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